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## WORDS.

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ONE may be able to read Sanscrit at sight ; to detect a false quantity in Latin verse as surely as the hound scents the hare ; to unfold Greek philosophy from its Dorian purity to its Alexandrine complexity ; to analyze the earth, and weigh the moon, and measure the stars ; but, at the end of it all, his scholarship is to be measured by his skill in the meaning, the use, and the weight of words.

I have quoted elsewhere and I quote here what can hardly be too often quoted, a remark of President Eliot's : " I recognize but one mental acquisition as an essential part of the education of a lady or gentleman—namely, an accurate and refined use of the mother tongue." So few people make this acquisition, that President Eliot's opinion was chiefly noticed only to be assaulted. It was generally considered as an attack on Greek, Latin, and the sciences ; and a wise world demanded severely of President Eliot : " What training to the powers of observation and of reasoning—what to the art faculties, to the knowledge of abstract truths—is given by a study of the mother tongue? Does it train the faculties which are trained by mathematics, science, metaphysics and æsthetics, or is the training of these faculties not essential to a good education?" All of which shows that when our early geographies used to say, " It is hard to find in the United States a native adult who cannot read and write with ease," the geographies were amusing themselves. There are many adult natives in the United States who cannot read and write. Most of the persons who commented in print upon President Eliot's remark did not know how to read it. A great mass of what is called criticism is worthless because the critics do not know how to read. Our good magazines are heavy and our poor magazines are light with trash because their subscribers, and sometimes their compilers, do not know how to read. Our literature is meagre, and our libraries overflow because the

public, including the publishers, do not know how to read, and the authors do not know how to write. This is not in itself a bad thing if we do not sit down content with it, and praise ourselves, and think it is, in itself, a good thing. We can well afford, indeed we are in duty bound, to view it cheerfully, as inevitable to an early and necessarily crude state of culture. Even trash is hopeful, so far as it indicates mental activity, intellectual aspiration, a tendency to rise above the brute towards the spirit. No mischief need be done except by calling it literature.

Nor need we bite the dust of our mother-land on the question of culture, dear as that dust is to us. We have proudly proclaimed that education is wider here than in England, but we have admitted that it is less deep. With her hereditary aristocracy and her ancient universities, we have frankly assumed that our scholars are not so scholarly as England's scholars, however our toilers of the sea and of the land may outstrip their English compeers. Perhaps this must be; yet Frederic Harrison, who is a graduate of Oxford, writes as recklessly as Professor Sumner, who is a graduate of Yale; and Rev. William Everett, who laid two countries under contribution to embellish his mind, is an equally solemn warning to both. All three can write boldly and attractively, but they are not cultured into that delicate and certain tact for truth which commands respect and bespeaks conviction; whose errors even do not forfeit confidence, because they spring from imperfect information, and not from vicious methods. All America, admiring but uncultivated, gazed with awe when the Earl of Derby sat down in his Earldom to translate a Greek poem; but a greater epic than Homer's was unfolding before his eyes that saw not. If his hoary universities could but have taught him to discern, he would have made a statelier figure in the history of his own times, and he would have builded better for the future.

It is wonderful that Mr. Gladstone should take heart, in the midst of pressing cares of state to write an article on Genesis for the refutation of scientists; but it is rather as an indication of his marvelous vitality than for any light he throws on Genesis. An American statesman of corresponding rank might treat the theme with even a reprehensible levity. I have known such a one to say, "the genesis of creation? Oh! yes. You believe an atom got out of bed one morning and resolved to be a world!" But with this predetermined and invincible wrongheadedness he hardly

hit wider of the scientific mark than did Mr. Gladstone. No, our American statesman does not know enough to write scientific articles on Genesis, but he has this unquestionable advantage over Mr. Gladstone—he knows enough not to !

On the other hand, Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Goschen use Mr. Gladstone's great political mistake, not with the candor of a culture superior to his, but with the "unhandsome thrift" of the narrow and the unscrupulous. When Mr. Chamberlain accused Mr. Gladstone of having been wrong on the American question twenty years ago, and inferred thence that he was likely to be wrong now, he spoke not in the character of a gentleman or a statesman. A colleague of Mr. Gladstone, and referring to an error long recognized and open to the world, his reference was a taunt and not an argument. With his prompt "hear ! hear !" Mr. Gladstone ranked himself at once as a man of candor and culture. It is the scholar, not the charlatan, who recognizes and rectifies his error. It is wisdom that advances even slowly. It may be stolidity as well as courage that stands stock still and fights. Mr. Chamberlain made a point, but it was in words only, not in argument. He cast no light and cleared no path.

When Mr. Goschen drew a parallel between the United States resisting secession, resenting and refusing the advice of Europe, and England resisting home rule in Ireland, resenting and repelling the eager hope and sympathy of America, he did not speak as a man of trained mind. He spoke rather as a man who does not understand, or who does not think that his hearers understand, the meaning and the use of words. To call a cat a dog is not the extinction of species, or the consolidation of classes, or a reduction to first principles, or a guide to wise action. It is simply a misuse of words, and it adds to whatever perplexity exists. To assume that the disruption of a nation all whose sections are equally free, is the same thing as demanding that all sections of a nation shall be equally free, is to discredit the university which cultivates the minds that frame and accept such a proposition. Parliament may cheer, but the judicious grieve.

When Mr. Gladstone eagerly denied having made a statement that he had resolved to reconstruct a certain bill and Mr. Goschen construed this denial into "information that the bill is not to be reconstructed," he spoke like one whose ear is not trained to understand words, or who means to darken counsel by perverting

words. If he confounded the terms honestly, his education is at fault. If he confounded the terms dishonestly, he must have a very low opinion of the education of England's "poor Right Honorable Rhetoricians." So, apparently, has Dominie Gladstone, patiently expounding to Parliamentary school-boys the rudimentary laws of language. "It is said that I announced that the bill was not to be reconstructed. I said nothing of the kind. I announced that I had not promised that it should be reconstructed, and there are gentlemen opposite who see no distinction between promising that the bill shall not be reconstructed and not having promised that it shall be reconstructed." One cannot help being a little meanly and maliciously, though patriotically, glad that there are such gentlemen over the water. There are plenty of them here, but we lay it to our crude civilization. If, however, they crop out as rankly in the England of Oxford and Cambridge as in our own superficial republic, perhaps our educational institutions are not so very inferior, after all !

We admit *a priori* the superior culture of England arising from conditions more favorable to culture ; yet we are confronted always with the fact that what should be the inevitable result of culture—a clear and comprehensive view of the situation—does not characterize the public men of England. Even the Grand Old Man has opened but slowly to the sunshine. A mass of English statesmen—will it be that one must say *the* mass?—seem at this moment sincerely to believe that the light is a great darkness hurrying towards them across the Irish Channel with fire and flood, cyclone and thunderbolt and unutterable ruin in its bosom.

And of all the ululations, the ululation of pure science is the loudest. The "poor Right Honorable Rhetoricians" beat their fists against blank walls, but Professor Huxley bangs his head, with frantic persistence, and will not be comforted. He has endured the misery of Ireland for many years, and we have not heard his voice ; but the misery of the attempt to remove it stimulates him to vigorous outcry. Starving, struggling, cursing, perishing, England has dragged Ireland chained to her feet and clogging her race for many generations, and Professor Huxley has "kept carefully out of the political field ;" but now that one has risen, full of years and honors, to deliver her from the body of this death, Professor Huxley calls two worlds to witness that the

act is one of "cowardly wickedness," base from the root and evil of fruit. Truly the ways of culture are inscrutable.

But the question is not chiefly a relative question. It is absolute. It is not which nation least understands the meaning, the use, and the weight of words, but how can we get understanding. It is not whether we, as a nation, are more or less inaccurate and mentally shambling than another nation; but how we can become accurate, how we can learn to walk with a firm tread to a fixed point.

Well, the first requisite is to be aware that we shamble. The first requisite to this perception is brain. The idiot does not know and cannot learn that his gait is uncertain or that he does not walk at all. The amply endowed may train his muscles till he becomes not only an athlete but an Apollo. A great deal of our bad writing is so bad that nothing can be done with it but let it alone. It does not rise to the height of being false or inartistic. It is a mere mush of words. No criticism of it is possible. It is only to be drenched off the page and the page dried in the sun. The author cannot be healed or helped. The trouble is organic. One might indeed say to him, "Go back. Go to school. Learn the alphabet. Be born again. Die and become a different person. Perhaps the next time your mind will be less flaccid." But it does no good. He likes to live as well as the rest. He likes the mush. It does not seem to him mushy. It seems to him thought and sense and a noble soul.

Even if he were not past hope the critic could not help him, because the critic has put to sea in the same boat. The author fumbles after a thought and the critic fumbles after the author with a purpose as definite and a hand as firm as those of the two-months' old infant fumbling after a sunbeam. "The stories and poems in this number are as usual, exceptionally good," says this critic, of the keen eye and the deft touch. He is American and amiable. But his equally amiable brother of the London Academy rivals him in tact for truth. With Professor Phelps' book, "My Study and Other Essays," before his eyes, and with the most fraternal design of saying pleasant things, he placidly upsets the dish into "My Study and Other Studies," and without the trouble of hiring even a tip-cart, calmly moves all these "Studies" from Andover Hill to "Andrew Seminary." No one is hurt, but is any one bettered? What value lies in observation so little regulated?

What skill can he have in the meaning, the use, and the weight of words who does not even look at the words to see what they are? How can a critic teach writing who does not know how to read?

In speaking then of the high art and the sacred obligation of words, a great crowd of writers and of critics must be abandoned as irreclaimable swamp lands. They may presently acquire sufficient consistency to give root to cryptogams and fungi, and in the fullness of geologic time be transmuted into a peat formation that shall nurture some future meadow on which the wild thyme grows. But the present reaps no harvest and relegates them to the beneficent designs of nature.

More to our purpose, altogether to our purpose, and the only ones to our purpose, are writers who have an end in view, and who move on distinct lines to its accomplishment. Them it is worth while to scrutinize for the common advantage. Of such is Professor Sumner. His theme is chiefly interesting to a political class, but his mode of treatment is a matter which concerns all who would teach or who would learn

“ High thought and amiable words,  
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,  
And love of truth, and all that makes a man.”

He represents a class whose lowest ranks are indeed impossible, but from whose upper ranks, the best work and the best results may come. His style is incisive, vigorous, forcible—sometimes picturesque, often abrupt, but not often coarsely so—never weak. It is a style well suited to clear thought, indicative of clear thought, arrogant, but with a certain charm of youthful strength in its arrogance. If its possessor would but lend himself a little while to the study of verbal science; would discipline his exuberant manhood by stooping to conquer the meaning, the use, and the weight of words, political science would be the gainer, whatever might become of protectionism or free trade. I might say that correct use of words is of more national importance than political dogma. I will say that logical thought, on related facts, is the one thing needful to political dogma, and that accuracy of words is at once source and offspring of logical thought.

Here is where Professor Sumner is on a wrong tack. “The word has been objected to,” he says scornfully. “The word is of

no consequence. He who, when he goes into a debate, begins to whine and cry as soon the blows get sharp, should learn to keep out." This is fearless and jolly, and spirited. If his major premise were right it would be magnificent. But the word *is* of consequence. The word *is* of the first consequence. It should be clear, adequate, legitimate. Words are the weapons of mental warfare. To juggle with words, in debate, is to violate the laws of war. To protest against fighting with poisoned wells and yellow fever infection, is not to whine and cry because the blows are sharp; it is to appeal to the higher law of the world, because the blows are foul. To be careless about words is to turn discussion into the blind and useless scrimmage of a mob. If debate is to be an orderly advance, or even a real effort towards a higher plane of thought and a greater wisdom of action, it must be conducted with careful and conscientious use of words. Swords and guns are the claws and teeth of wild beasts, sharpened and strengthened into far greater power by human intelligence, but still brutal power. Words are guns and swords transmuted by human intelligence into infinitely sharper and stronger force, but of mental, not of animal force. Claws and teeth tear what they clutch. Swords and guns tear what they touch, and their touch may be afar. Words take no note of space, but from silence and solitude reach to the ends of the earth. They, therefore, bespeak the elevation of the spirit over the beast, and all tampering with words is retrogression towards the spirit of the beast that goeth downward, as all use and improvement of words is an advance with the spirit of man that goeth upward. The word is the temple of the spirit. If any man defile the temple, he sins against the spirit of truth, for the temple of the Holy Spirit is holy.

Without regard to Professor Sumner's opinions, but simply with regard to his manner of attaining and enforcing them; and because he is, if not the ablest, certainly a racy and entertaining employer of wrong methods—so able and effective, that with right methods, he must become a successful investigator and expounder of truth—let me illustrate my position by some instances of his purely reckless misuse of words.

"There are only three ways," he says, "in which a man can part with his product. 1st. He may exchange his product for the product of others. Then he parts with his property voluntarily, and for an equivalent. Taxes which



are paid for peace, order, and security fall under this head. 2d. He may give his property away. Then he parts with it voluntarily, without an equivalent. Taxes which are voluntarily paid for schools, libraries, parks, etc., fall under this head. 3d. He may be robbed of it. Then he parts with it involuntarily, and without an equivalent. Taxes which are protective fall under this head. The analysis is exhaustive, and there is no other place for them."

Never, surely, was a swifter or an easier fall from grace than this by which a few millions of our respected protectionist fellow-citizens become highway robbers. But a moment's real attention cannot fail to show that the word *voluntary* is engaged in a violent contra-dance with itself. When the music stops, let us ask whether voluntary taxes are taxes which every individual man wishes to pay, or which men, collected into a nation, expressing their will in a regular and appointed way, decide to pay. If the first, then no tax is voluntary, for no tax is imposed or paid of which a great many persons do not disapprove, and which they pay, sometimes with protest, sometimes without notice, always without will. Women who pay taxes do not part with their property voluntarily. Indeed I never saw a woman who thought she received any equivalent for her tax-money. In most cases she looks upon it as dead loss. Enormous taxes were paid during the rebellion, for peace, order, and security, entirely involuntarily by men who did not approve of the war which necessitated taxation. If the second, then all taxes are voluntary. King George is dead, the Fourth of July is established, and no man in this country pays a tax, whether for peace and order, or for parks and schools, or for protectionism, that is not the voluntary act of the people through the legally appointed medium—town tax, by the Selectmen; county tax, by the Board of Commissioners; municipal tax, by the Aldermen; State tax, by the General Court; national tax, by Congress. No tax is, was or ever can be levied against the wish of the majority. Therefore all taxation in this country is voluntary. Therefore our respected protection fellow-citizens who are walking up and down our streets, are not even out on bail. They are out because the indictment is quashed. They are out, because any tax laid upon any individual, under a law passed by a majority, in a nation whose authority is founded on the will of the majority, is a legal tax, and is in no sense robbery. It may be an unwise, even a mischievous tax, but it is not robbery. Whether it is a tax to provide a post office, or to arm a soldier, or to establish a custom

house, it is not robbery. It is no more robbery than it is robbery to tax a man for a jail who believes in moral suasion, or for a high school when he believes in only primary education, or for the army when he was reared a Quaker. The objection to calling such taxation robbery is not that the language is plain, but that it is not true. We do not whine and cry because the blow is hard, but we regret that so much good muscle should be wasted in beating the air. Any man is justified in, "pushing the controversy just as hard as he can," but this is pushing it a great deal harder than he can hold. It is not a question whether protectionism is right or wrong, or wise or foolish. It is not even necessary to masquerade under an affectation of knowing what protectionism is. Let protectionism be represented by  $x$ , and it remains that people who agree to live under the rule of the majority, are not robbed when the majority decrees  $x$ . To call protection robbery and protectionists humbugs, does not place a stigma on protection, but it diminishes confidence in the political economist who employs the nomenclature.

A similar confusion beclouds the word *equivalent*. Why are peace and order an equivalent for taxes, and parks and schools not? Taxes are not laid for peace and security in the abstract. They are laid to pay the policemen and soldiers and judges who maintain peace. Schools, libraries, and parks are not created for themselves, but for the order and intelligence which they are believed to secure. Why is not a head master just as much an equivalent as a chief of police? When the political economist says "Mischief is done by taxes which are laid to buy parks and libraries," he propounds an open question, a legitimate object of discussion, but foreign to the purpose of this paper. When he adds that "the tax-layer is not providing public order. He is spending other people's earnings for them. He is deciding that his neighbor shall have less clothes and more library or park," he comes instantly into our province of words. The tax-layer is made tax-layer by the very people who are paying the taxes. He buys parks and libraries, because the people who made him tax-layer believe that parks and libraries and schools help to secure public order. He is spending other people's earnings for them exactly as the architect spends the house-builder's earnings for him. He decides that his neighbor shall have less clothes and library, because his neighbor elected him at the polls to look into that very question

and decide upon it, and paid him for doing it. If he lays a protective tax on sugar, "the legislator who has in his hands this power of taxation" is not committing a "monstrous abuse." He is committing no abuse at all. The tax may be a fatally foolish tax, but he imposes it because there are more people in the country who think it wise than who think it foolish, and of those persons he is not only one, but the one chosen by them to speak for them. This may be a weak form of government, but it is the form with which we are experimenting. We may not succeed in making a spoon, but we have not yet spoiled our horn.

"Pauper labor" is another phrase which darkens counsel. The political economist chooses to mean by it the labor of paupers, and calls it "senseless jingle," as it certainly is if that is what it means; since there is probably not enough of it in all Europe appreciably to affect the problem of labor. But intelligent voters of very moderate general culture always I think mean by it labor so poorly paid as to tend to reduce the industrious laborer to the condition of the pauper; so poorly paid that the laborer cannot gratify a legitimate ambition for independence, but must use each day's wages for each day's needs, so that when illness or age arrives, he has no resources to fall back upon, but must eat the bitter bread of charity. We shall not get one inch ahead on the way of life so long as one party to debate is talking about one thing and the other party about another.

"Commerce, *i. e.*, the ship-building and carrying trade has been crushed out of existence," says the political economist. But ship-building and the carrying-trade are not commerce any more than the American express or the pasteboard-box manufacturer are the fine art of millinery. I know a village where the carrying trade was temporarily crushed out of existence because the horse died; but Boston kept on making bonnets and the suburbs kept on wearing them; and the British ships, *i. e.*, the suburban men who went to town each day on business had to carry the bonnets back and forth with great agony. We can make little headway towards the truth so long as one party is talking about a hand-cart on the sidewalk and the other is talking about the goods that are to be packed within it.

Professor Sumner inspires us with hope of a dawning perception of the importance of words when he objects to the phrase "giving work." But alas! the dawn is quickly overcast, for his own sub-

stituted phraseology is open to the same objection that lies against the protectionists' phrase. "On that notion we live to work ; we do not work to live. But we do not want work. We have too much work. We want a living." But we are not content with a living any more than we are content with work. Men and women want a great deal more than a living. If it is a bad man he wants cigars, the first chance at the newspaper, and to have his own way. If he is a good man he wants clear vision, a family horse, and not to sacrifice more bobolinks on toast than his wife wears humming-birds in her bonnet. If she is a good woman she wants church, opera, high-mindedness, and to have her own way. If she is a bad woman she wants a tailor-suit. All these satisfactions are no more expressed in "a living" than in "work." If Professor Sumner would spare a little time to the study of domestic economy he would find around the college square scores of young creatures who have an assured "living," but who would exclaim with Rebekah of old, "What good shall my life do me unless I have a long red redingote for a boating-costume in the coming summer?" Really Professor Sumner will find that he has to cram almost as much into the word *living* as into the word *work*.

When the political economist goes still further and, on the assumption that the protectionist means work in itself, and not the fruits and satisfactions of work, says that the protectionist argues that "hardship disciplines a man and is good for him ; hence that the free traders, who want people to do what is easiest, would corrupt them, and that protectionists, by 'making work,' bring in salutary discipline for the people," it seems impossible not to believe that neglect of the obligation of words has not only dimmed the intellectual, but clouded the moral perceptions. I should like to know the name and post-office address of the protectionists who have used that argument.

"The State," says Professor Sumner, "never is or can be anything but some other people." But the intelligent voter of whatever degree of general culture knows that "the State" is himself and all other people. "The State" is all the people together, compacted into an organization. It is all the people, organized for the very purpose of doing in their collective capacity whatever work can be better done in this way than by individuals. It is all the people, organized on the familiar, the encouraging, the only reassuring Republican principle that all are wiser than one.

What the work is which "the State" can most wisely undertake may be an ever-open question, but what "the State" is, is a closed question, and it is not what Professor Sumner says it is. Not because she wishes her letters carried at "some other people's" expense, does Massachusetts desire the post office to be a national institution. She knows well that she could carry her letters at a handsome profit ; that she pays into the national treasury for mail carriage far more than its cost. Her intelligent voters have general culture enough to see that it is better for them and better for the country that they should sacrifice this immediate profit to the carriage of letters in Mississippi and Dakota. They believe that on the whole and in the long-run all the States are better served, the intelligence and happiness of the future better secured, by intrusting the mails to "the State," than to individuals ; because individuals, working only for themselves, will not carry the mail except where it can be carried with individual and immediate profit ; and in many of our States and Territories, it can be carried only with loss. To call the relegation of large interests to "the State" an attempt to be saved trouble and to be assured profits at the expense of one's fellow citizens is to have a very crude notion of "the State," and a very inadequate notion of the meaning, the use, and the weight of words.

The principles of political science, like the principles of mathematical science, exist entirely independent of our discovery or comprehension of them. We may invent a thousand adaptations to them, but we never invent a principle. The curve of the earth's orbit we did not describe and we cannot maintain ; but we are good farmers only in proportion as we plant in accordance with it. The laws of political science are as impersonal as the laws of mathematical science. A nation grows in strength and in grace according as it discovers and applies those laws. But the political scientist no more advances society by calling "the State" a shirk, than the mathematician advances crops by calling a circle the shortest distance between two points.

GAIL HAMILTON.